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VOC FOR IOP/FN  
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0116  
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NIGERIA'S NEW STATES

ANNCR:

ON TUESDAY; NIGERIA ANNOUNCED IT HAS CREATED SEVEN NEW STATES. VOA'S WEST AFRICAN CORRESPONDENT, JOHN ROBERTS, HAS THESE THOUGHTS ON THE EFFECT THIS WILL HAVE ON THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE.

VOICE:

NIGERIA NOW HAS NINETEEN STATES INSTEAD OF THE TWELVE IT HAD FORMERLY. FIVE OF THE STATES WITH LARGEST POPULATIONS WERE BROKEN UP, THE OTHER SEVEN WERE UNCHANGED; THE TWO BIGGEST, WESTERN AND NORTHEAST STATE, WERE EACH SPLIT INTO THREE PARTS. EAST CENTRAL, NORTHWEST AND BUNU PLATEAU WERE EACH DIVIDED INTO TWO NEW STATES. THE CHANGES WILL HAVE THE EFFECT OF MORE EQUALLY DISTRIBUTING THE POPULATION OF NIGERIA SO THAT NO STATE WILL NOW HAVE MORE THAN ABOUT SIX MILLION PEOPLE. ALSO, NIGERIA HAS DECIDED TO GET AWAY FROM USING GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTIONS, SUCH AS NORTH WEST, TO IDENTIFY STATES. EACH STATE WILL NOW HAVE A PLACE NAME, GENERALLY THAT OF THE CAPITAL. FOR INSTANCE NORTH CENTRAL STATE WILL NOW BE KNOWN AS KADUNA.

THE PURPOSE OF CREATING THE NEW STATES IS TWO-FOLD: IT WILL MEAN A SPEED-UP OF DEVELOPMENT IN THOSE REGIONS, AND IN SOME AREAS, RE-DEFINED STATE BORDERS WILL ADMINISTRATIVELY RE-UNITE ETHNIC POPULATIONS. ON THE FIRST POINT, NIGERIA HAS FOUND FROM EXPERIENCE THAT THE CREATION OF NEW STATES IS AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO SPEED DEVELOPMENT. IN NINETEEN SIXTY-SEVEN, THE YEAR-OLD

FORMER GOVERNMENT OF GENERAL YAKUBU GOWON INCREASED THE NUMBER OF STATES FROM FOUR TO TWELVE. THE CREATION OF NEW STATE CAPITALS IN THOSE REGIONS MEANT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY WHICH GREATLY HELPED TO INCREASE DISTRIBUTION OF GOODS AND SERVICES. THE PRESENT MILITARY GOVERNMENT OF GENERAL MURTALA MUHAMMED CLEARLY EXPECTS THE SAME THING TO TAKE PLACE IN THE NEW STATES JUST CREATED.

FOR THE NIGERIAN IN THE COUNTRY SIDE, THE CHANGE MEANS THAT, IN A NUMBER OF REGIONS, THE GOVERNMENT WILL MOVE CLOSER TO HIM AND THAT HE WILL NOW HAVE GREATER ACCESS TO PEOPLE AND OFFICES HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE HIS LIFE. SOME NIGERIANS WILL ALSO FIND THAT THEY ARE NOW ADMINISTRATIVELY LINKED WITH PEOPLE OF THE SAME ETHNIC ORGIN. THE PRESENT STATE BORDERS WERE INHERITED FROM THE OLD PROVINCIAL BOUNDRIES SET UP BY THE BRITISH DURING THE COLONIAL ERA. THESE BOUNDRIES FREQUENTLY DISREGARDED ETHNIC GROUPINGS, AND PEOPLE FROM A CERTAIN CULTURAL BACKGROUND FOUND THEMSELVES LUMPED IN WITH STRANGERS. IN THE NEW PLAN ANNOUNCED TUESDAY, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS SOUGHT TO RE-ALIGN SOME OF THE BOUNDRIES TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE SITUATION.

HOWEVER, GENERAL MUHAMMED MADE IT CLEAR THAT THIS PARTICULAR APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM IS OVER. HE SAID WE CANNOT CONTINUE TO DIVIDE OUR COUNTRY ALONG ETHNIC LINES. AND HE INDICATED THAT WITH THE LATEST INCREASE IN STATES TO NINETEEN, THE PROCESS OF DIVISION COMES TO AN END.

ONE OTHER MAJOR CHANGE WAS ANNOUNCED BY GENERAL MUHAMMED. THE NATION'S CAPITAL, NOW CENTERED IN LAGOS, WILL BE MOVED ABOUT 20 KILOMETERS OUTSIDE OF THE CITY

TO AN AREA CALLED IKEJA, THE PRESENT SITE OF THE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. IT IS HOPED THAT THE MOVE MAY HELP EASE SOME OF THE CONGESTION IN LAGOS, AND CONTRIBUTE TO A SMOOTHER RUNNING OF THE GOVERNMENT.

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